

VZCZCXRO9976  
RR RUEHPA RUEHROV  
DE RUEHFR #1011/01 0471803  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 161803Z FEB 06  
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4339  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0806  
RUEHTRO/USLO TRIPOLI 0036

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001011

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CT](#) [FR](#)  
SUBJECT: FRANCE/C.A.R.: MFA ENCOURAGED BUT CONCERNS REMAIN

REF: PARIS 598

PARIS 00001011 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Acting Polcouns Bruce Turner, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: French MFA officials on February 15 stressed continuing GOF interest in the Central African Republic (C.A.R.), based on its strategic location, role in regional crises, and precarious status as an impoverished state that could become a failed state. The MFA officials claimed President Bozize played a useful role in the Chad-Sudan talks in Tripoli. The French were encouraged by C.A.R.'s hosting a ministerial meeting in Bangui (February 20-23) to prepare for the next Great Lakes Summit, to take place later this year in Kenya. Cameroon has signaled its willingness to contribute troops to the FOMUC peacekeeping mission in C.A.R., which would allow Gabon to withdraw some of its FOMUC contingent. The MFA defended the legitimacy of Bozize's temporary period of "rule by decree" and asserted that the C.A.R. president remained subject to constitutional controls; Bozize does not have a "blank check." However, the French remained concerned about the actions of the C.A.R.'s security forces (especially the presidential guard units) and Bozize's apparent unwillingness to acknowledge that their conduct was a problem. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) FRENCH INTERESTS: MFA officials Isabelle Guisnel (deputy to DAS-equivalent Foucher) and Charlotte Montel (C.A.R. deskoff) discussed C.A.R. developments on February 15. Guisnel provided an overview of France's interests. C.A.R. was becoming more important because of its geographic location and thus its proximity to several countries plagued by instability, ethnic conflict, and humanitarian and human rights concerns. These included Sudan and Chad to the north and east, and problems associated with the Great Lakes to the South. C.A.R. was perforce part of the equation in French evaluations of these different problems. Moreover, Guisnel emphasized that C.A.R.'s extreme poverty, if not addressed by the international community, risked allowing C.A.R. to become a "failed state," which would add yet another negative element to the region. Guisnel said that France was thus paying more attention to C.A.R. in an effort to ensure that it could, to the extent possible, be part of regional solutions and not an additional regional problem. She hoped that the U.S. also viewed C.A.R. in this light.

13. (C) TRIPOLI: Montel said that C.A.R. President Bozize played a useful role at the February 8-9 Tripoli Summit focused on Sudan and Chad. Bozize's presence was warranted because of the common borders shared by C.A.R., Sudan, and Chad, the very porous nature of those borders, and the effect that any settlement or cease-fire would have on C.A.R.'s own security posture. Montel explained that Bozize's presence was useful in facilitating discussion among Deby, Bashir, and

Qadhafi. She asserted that Bozize enjoyed far better personal relations with the other leaders than had his predecessor, President Patasse. Bozize was close to Deby and had a "decent" relationship with Bashir and Qadhafi, whereas Patasse was often feuding with one or the others. Although Montel indicated that Bozize did not have much of a role in crafting the eventual Sudan-Chad agreement in Tripoli, she said that his personal presence helped smooth interaction among the others.

¶4. (SBU) C.A.R. ENGAGEMENT: France is supportive of increased C.A.R. participation in regional issues, Montel said. She cited Bangui's hosting a ministerial meeting on the Great Lakes (February 20-23) to prepare for the Great Lakes Summit to take place in Kenya later in 2006.

¶5. (C) CAMEROON/C.A.R.: Cameroon recently indicated that it would provide troops to FOMUC, the small peacekeeping operation in western C.A.R. under CEMAC (Central African Economic and Monetary Community), Montel noted. Cameroon's offer followed a request to Cameroon from Gabon, which had been seeking to reduce its troop contribution to FOMUC. "A Biya favor to Bongo," Montel remarked on Cameroon's willingness to participate in FOMUC. Nonetheless, France was very encouraged by this sign, which perhaps indicated a change in Cameroon's traditional stance of not wanting to get involved in regional issues. Montel said that increased Cameroonian engagement in regional issues could only be a plus for all concerned.

¶6. (C) FRENCH HELICOPTERS: Montel said she was not sure that the two helicopters France had supplied to C.A.R. in January (for logistical and not combat support operations) had left C.A.R. In principle, they were to be there for only one month (i.e., the month of January) but Montel was not sure they had left. She said she would not be surprised if they were still in C.A.R., and would check. (COMMENT:

PARIS 00001011 002.2 OF 002

Montel's unawareness of the status of the helicopters was surprising but may reflect the MFA's marginal role in a process directed by the French Presidency's foreign policy shop. END COMMENT.)

¶7. (C) "RULE BY DECREE:" Bozize's three-month period of "ruling by decree," about half over now, seemed to be problem-free, Montel said. She noted that this constitutionally authorized measure was not unchecked -- the parliament had certain powers of review. The President did not have a "blank check," she observed. Still, she said that France remained alert to any abuses and would be very concerned if Bozize tried to extend the period beyond the end of March.

¶8. (C) WORRIES ABOUT RULE OF LAW PERSIST: Despite the several encouraging signs, Montel said that France continued to be concerned about serious problems that did not seem to be abating in C.A.R. There were two significant areas of concern -- corruption and the lawlessness of the security forces, especially the presidential guard. C.A.R. was not doing enough to combat corruption, she said, which only exacerbated C.A.R.'s chronic economic problems and deep poverty, and the lawlessness problem seemed to receive little high-level attention. She noted an incident on February 13 involving a battle between presidential guard units and police forces, after the police had arrested a member of the presidential guard. The arrested man's comrades then attacked the police station where he was held, resulting in several wounded, and then attacked the central police commissariat, causing more casualties. Montel said that this incident brought to mind the Sanze case in January, which involved similar misconduct on the part of C.A.R. security forces.

¶9. (C) BOZIZE DOESN'T GET IT?: More troubling, Montel confided, was the fact that Bozize did not seem to understand

the seriousness of the problem. She said that a French journalist had recently interviewed Bozize and then related the conversation to the French Embassy in Bangui. Asked by the journalist about the problem of the presidential guards, Bozize reportedly started making excuses and employing legalistic jargon to rationalize the behavior of the presidential guards. This, Montel said, showed that he was either unwilling or unable to understand that rule of law questions and issues of good governance were very important to C.A.R.'s reputation and its standing in the international community, and could seriously influence members of the donor community. Montel said that France would continue to emphasize to C.A.R. leaders the need to make sure that all elements of the C.A.R. government act within the law.

Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

Stapleton